

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 CU-05 OMB-01 DRC-01 /097 W

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R 150916Z JUL 74

FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3338

INFO AMEMBASSY SEOUL

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L TOKYO 9331

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, JA, KS

SUBJ: JAPANESE HANDLING OF ROK COURT MARTIAL SENTENCES

SUMMARY: GOJ HAS WORKED TO LIMIT IMPACT OF ROK ACTION AGAINST JAPANESE STUDENTS BY 1) RECOGNIZING BLAME WHERE DUE, 2) PREPARING PUBLIC OPINION FOR HARSH SENTENCES, 3) PLAYING DOWN POSSIBILITY OF VERY LENIENT POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, WHILE 4) HOLDING OUT PROSPECT THAT SOME ROK GESTURE WILL BE FORTHCOMING. THOUGH REACTIONS STILL MUSHY AND PREMATURE, STRATEGY MAY BE WORKING. ONE EFFECT OF BALANCED AND LOW KEY APPROACH MAY BE TO DIVERT FIRE FROM ROK TO GOVT ITSELF. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING WEEK LEADING UP TO SENTENCING IN SEOUL TODAY OF JAPANESE STUDENTS ACCUSED OF SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES AGAINST ROK, GOJ HAS WORKED TO LIMIT IMPACT OF POTENTIALLY EXPLOSIVE ISSUE ON BOTH PUBLIC OPINION AND FOREIGN RELATIONS. FROM OUTSET, PRESS GUIDANCE HAS MADE NO EFFORT TO GLOSS OVER FACT THAT STUDENTS IF NOT GUILTY OF ALL THE CHARGES LEVELLED BY THE ROK COURT MARTIAL, AT LEAST ENGAGED IN UNAUTHORIZED POLITICAL ACTIVITIES IN KOREA. AT
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THE SAME TIME GOVT SPOKESMEN, MOST NOTABLY AMBASSADOR

USHIROKU IN HIS ARRIVAL STATEMENT AT HANEDA AIRPORT JULY 14, HAVE POINTED UP DIFFERENCE IN POLITICAL SITUATIONS IN KOREA AND JAPAN IN EFFORT TO EXPLAIN WHY THE STUDENTS' ACTIONS SHOULD BE REGARDED WITH SUCH SEVERITY BY ROK GOVT.

2. SIMULTANEOUSLY GOJ HAS MADE SURE THAT PUBLIC WAS PREPARED FOR HARSH SENTENCES, FIRST IN PRESS BACKGROUNDER AND LATER IN GIVING FULL COVERAGE TO DEMANDS OF PROSECUTOR FOR TWENTY-YEAR SENTENCES ON JULY 12. THOUGH EVERYONE, INCLUDING FONMIN SOURCES PROFESSED SHOCK THAT ACTUAL SENTENCES HANDED DOWN JULY 15 WERE AS TOUGH AS DEMANDED, NEWS CAME AS NO REAL SURPRISE.

3. GOJ HAS ACCOMPANIED THESE APPROACHES WITH EFFORTS TO EXPLAIN SEVERE LIMITS TO JAPANESE LEVERAGE ON THIS ISSUE AS A WAY OF DEFLATING HOPES FOR LENIENT POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, FONMIN PRESS BACKGROUNDER JULY 15 MADE CLEAR THAT ONLY THE ROK HAD THE RIGHT TO MAKE POLITICAL SOLUTION AND THAT CASE QUITE DIFFERENT FROM KIM TAE-JUNG ABDUCTION IN THAT ACTIONS OF JAPANESE STUDENTS IN KOREA WERE THOSE OF PRIVATE CITIZENS. SAME REPORT NOTED HIGH FONMIN SOURCES AS STATING THEY ASSUMED THAT STUDENTS WOULD HAVE TO SERVE AT LEAST PART OF SENTENCE, A VIEW ALSO EXPRESSED BY USHIROKU UPON HIS RETURN.

4. WHATEVER THE GOJ EFFORTS TO PREPARE PUBLIC OPINION AND DEFLATE HOPES, THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE DOUBT THAT FONMIN EXPECTS SOME POLITICAL GESTURE ON PART OF ROK. BOTH AMBASSADOR USHIROKU AND FONMIN SPOKESMAN JULY 15 STATED THAT THEY BELIEVE STUDENTS WILL BE EXPELLED BEFORE FINISHING SENTENCES. PRESS BACKGROUNDER, WHICH OCCURRED AFTER MEETING BETWEEN VICE FONMIN TOGO, ASIAN BUREAU DIRECTOR TAKASHIMA, TREATIES BUREAU DIRECTOR MATSUNAGA, AND AMBASSADOR USHIROKU DESCRIBED FONMIN QTE FEELING UNQTE THAT ROK WILL NOT PERMIT STUDENT ISSUE TO INFLUENCE RELATIONS WITH JAPAN. IMPLICATION WAS THAT ROK FAILURE TO MAKE ANY GESTURE WOULD IN FACT DAMAGE TIES.

5. COMMENT: SO FAR, THOUGH REACTIONS STILL MUSHY AND PREMATURE, BALANCED LOW-KEY APPROACH APPEARS TO HAVE WORKED.
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ED TO LIMIT PUBLIC OUTCRY. THERE WAS SMALL STUDENT DEMONSTRATION AT KOREAN EMBASSY SEVERAL DAYS AGO, AND PUBLIC GROUP TO QTE SAVE STUDENTS UNQTE HAS BEEN FORMED. HOWEVER, INITIAL PRESS REACTIONS SO FAR HAVE LACKED STEAM AND FOCUS. THE FEW PRIVATE JAPANESE REACTIONS THAT EMBASSY OFFICERS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO ASCERTAIN SO FAR MIX INDIGNATION OVER KOREAN TREATMENT OF JAPANESE CITIZENS WITH RECOGNITION THAT THE STUDENTS WERE BREAKING ROK LAWS.

6. ONE EFFECT OF GOJ APPROACH MAY BE TO DIVERT
CRITICISM FROM ROK TO GOVT ITSELF. ALREADY, JULY 15 ASAHI
SHIMBUN HAS BEGUN TO DEMAND SOLUTION TO PROBLEMS BETWEEN
GOJ AND ROK BY RESORT TO QTE DIPLOMACY OF REASON AND CON-
SISTENCY UNQTE. MORE SUCH DEMANDS LIKELY, ESPECIALLY IF
ROK GESTURE HOPED FOR BY GOJ DOES NOT MATERIALIZE. FACT
THAT GOJ APPEARS TO RECOGNIZE BOTH SENSITIVITY AND UN-
PREDICTABILITY OF ISSUE SHOWN IN CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY
NIKAIDO'S REFUSAL THIS EVENING TO MAKE ANY COMMENT ON
CASE. QTE THE GOVT'S ATTITUDE IS UNDER STUDY IN FOREIGN
MINISTRY UNQTE WAS ALL HE WOULD SAY.
SHOESMITH

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